Benefits and Secrets of Fasting

Introduction:

It is the nature of the human soul to slacken and become bored and tired of striving, especially in the face of the temptations of life, the many pleasures of this world, and the deception of Satan. As a result, the soul becomes weak in performing obligatory duties and acts of worship; it gradually becomes less affected by them and benefits less from them. It is the wisdom and mercy of Allaah The Almighty that He has ordained for the soul all that strengthens its weakness, sharpens its determination, and increases its faith through the virtue He conferred on certain times and places. The seasons of virtue, for instance, include the first ten days of *Thul-Hijjah*, the 10th of *Muharram*, and *Ramadhaan*.

Fasting is a great act of worship that Allaah The Almighty made one of the pillars of Islam and prescribed upon the Muslims – not for one day or a week, but for an entire month every year.

Allaah The Almighty has made fasting an obligation in His upright religion since the times of the previous nations, and, therefore, Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.***}** [Quran 2:183] Fasting is not an exclusive obligation on the Muslim *Ummah* (nation); it is an age-old religious duty, because of its importance and great impact on the souls of humankind.

Scientists and educators have spoken at length about the educational benefits of fasting, so much so, that it is called 'the school of fasting' due to

its enormous benefits that are considered a means of educating and disciplining the self.

An act of worship of such importance and benefit obliges us to seek the benefits involved and try to take advantage of them. We often see those who provide educational or administrative courses presenting the advantages and benefits of these courses before people enroll for them. Similarly, we are going to embark on an act of worship that resembles a course or a school where the Muslim is brought up on a set of virtues and gives up a set of vices. Therefore, we must know these benefits and secrets.

(1) *Taqwa* **(Piety):**

Taqwa is the ultimate goal of the obligation of fasting, as Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become pious.***}** [Quran 2:183]

The desired outcome of fasting represents the ultimate goal of all acts of worship. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***O mankind, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, that you may become pious.***}** [Quran 2:21] The Arabic term *Taqwa* and the verbs derived from it mean 'fearing Allaah The Almighty' Who Says (what means):

- **{***O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul.***}** [Quran 4:1]
- **{***When their brother Nooh (Noah) said to them, "Will you not fear Allaah?***}** [Quran 26:106]

Nevertheless, the term *Taqwa* (piety) carries various meanings in the

Quran. For example, it has come in the sense of faith and its testimony. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***And He imposed upon them the word of Taqwa, and they were more deserving of it and worthy of it. And ever Is Allaah, of all things, Knowing.***}** [Quran 48:26]

It also means repentance, as Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***And if only the people of the cities had believed and feared Allaah (i.e. repented to Allaah), We would have opened upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth; but they denied [the messengers], so We seized them for what they were earning."***}** [Quran 7:96]

In another verse it is interpreted as sincerity, as Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***That [is so]. And whoever honors the symbols of Allaah - indeed, it is from the piety (i.e. sincerity) of hearts.***}** [Quran 22:32] [Ar-Raazi in *Tafseer Fat-h Al-Ghayb*]

The essence of piety is that the slave knows Allaah The Almighty by His names and attributes and knows His greatness, dominance, grandeur, and power, so that he fears Him and is cautious not to fall into sin. He should know His mercy, forgiveness and countless favors, as well as what He prepared for His believing slaves. This would urge him to pursue His pleasure. A slave cannot achieve piety except by constantly obeying Allaah The Almighty, carrying out obligations, and doing many voluntary acts of worship.

Piety therefore involves being cautious regarding the actions that bring about punishment, and for the observant believers, it involves caution regarding the factors that distance one from Allaah The Almighty. It is like a person walking on a road full of thorns and trying his best to avoid

treading on them. ‘Umar, may Allaah be pleased with him, asked Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, may Allaah be pleased with him, *"What is piety?"* Ubayy, may Allaah be pleased with him, said: *"O Commander of the Believers, have you ever walked on a thorny road?"* He said, *"Yes."* Ubayy, may Allaah be pleased with him, asked, *"What did you do?"* He said, *"I rolled up my clothes and tried my best to avoid the thorns."* He said, *"That is piety."* [*Tafseer Ibn Katheer*]

The pious person evades the thorns of the road, which are sins, misdeeds or even permissible acts that distance him from his Lord. He is always cautious. When he takes a step, he asks himself why he is taking it. When he sees a woman, he fears Allaah The Almighty and lowers his gaze. He always feels that Allaah The Almighty is watching Him; he fears Him and obeys Him in all injunctions and prohibitions wherever he is, even with regard to his food and drink. Abu Bakr, may Allaah be pleased with him, had a slave who brought him his earnings. One day he brought him something to eat and when Abu Bakr, may Allaah be pleased with him, had eaten some of it, the slave asked him, *“Do you know where I got that (food) from?”* Abu Bakr, may Allaah be pleased with him, asked what it was, and the slave replied, *"I did some soothsaying for a man in the pre-Islamic period, and not being good at it, I deceived him; today he met me and he rewarded me for that soothsaying with what you have eaten."* Abu Bakr, may Allaah be pleased with him, put his hand in his mouth and vomited all that he had eaten. It was said to him, *"May Allaah have mercy upon you! You do all this for this bite of food?"* He said, *"If this bite would not come out except with my soul, I would have gotten it out. I heard the Messenger of Allaah, sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, say, ' Hell is more fitting for the body that is nourished with ill-gotten gains.' I feared that some part of my body would grow from this bite."* Look at this splendid example of piety

from this Companion despite his position in Islam, *Jihaad* (striving in the cause of Allaah The Almighty), *Da'wah* (calling to Islam), and collection of good deeds. Nevertheless, he was not deceived by all this and he had great fear and caution.

Piety is the provision of the soul with which a person travels to his Lord and arrives unharmed and full of hope. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allaah.***}** [Quran 2:197] Ibn Al-Qayyim, may Allaah have mercy upon him, says, *"Allaah commanded the pilgrims to take provisions for their travel, and not to travel without them. Then, He alerted them to the provisions required for traveling to the Hereafter, which is piety or fearing Allaah."* [*Badaa'i' At-Tafseer*, p.388]

Ibn Al-Qayyim said,

> *"The body does not become sound except with food which replenishes its energy and with excreting wastes, toxins and bad mixtures that, if accumulated in large quantities, would spoil it. It also requires a healthy diet, which protects the body from harmful things. Similarly, the heart cannot survive except with the sustenance of faith and good deeds, which saves its energy, and with sincere repentance that removes the corrupt elements and bad manners from it, and with a healthy diet which maintains its health. Piety involves these three things, and any decrease in any of them corresponds to decrease in piety."*

The person who walks in this life without piety or fear of Allaah The Almighty often slips and Satan becomes very close to him.

One may ask: What is the relationship between fasting and piety?
The secret for ending the verse of fasting with piety is that the preparation of the hearts of fasting people to fear Allaah The Almighty entails many aspects. The greatest aspect is that fasting is entrusted to the soul and conscience of the fasting person. No one is watching him except Allaah The Almighty. Therefore, it is a secret between the slave and his Lord – no one knows about it but Allaah The Almighty. That is because a person can break his fast secretly without the knowledge of the people closest to him. However, the Muslim is honest in keeping his fast regardless of the experiences he has or the desires and temptations he faces. Fasting through a full month trains the Muslim on this great trait.

Fasting, which involves responding to the commands of Allaah The Almighty, and relinquishing what the souls love and need without being watched by anyone other than Allaah The Almighty, instills piety in the hearts. Fasting prepares the soul of the Muslim to fear Allaah The Almighty and be conscious of Him throughout the year. What makes you conscious of Him in this month should make you conscious of Him all the year, since the Lord of all months is One, Who is watching and observing you. How great is this benefit! It is fostering piety and permanent consciousness in the souls everywhere and at any time. Is there any law that nurtures this sensitivity?

This is the reason why a noble man says, *"Constitutions, laws and regulations, no matter how precise and accurate, cannot shape man from within, nor can they make his conscience, his heart, his sentiment, or emotions. They only control the appearance. Fasting as an act of worship is a divine approach that awakens the conscience, revives feelings, and alerts the senses, and thus purifies life from oppression, injustice and*

corruption."

Therefore, you find people in *Ramadhaan* with a high level of this sensitivity, which is coupled with piety and caution, and thus they ask about the ruling on swallowing one's saliva, chewing food, and using a toothbrush. If only this sensitivity would continue after *Ramadhaan*!

For many people, when the day dawns in *Ramadhaan,* it brings with it God-consciousness; however, when the night comes, it disappears. Why does this happen, when our Lord for whom we fasted during the day sees us during the night as well? Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***It is the same [to Him] concerning you whether one conceals [his] speech or one publicizes it and whether one is hidden by night or conspicuous [among others] by day.***}** [Quran 13:10]

We are badly in need of piety that develops God-consciousness – such that the slave fears his Lord and becomes conscious of Him all the time, especially in seclusion where no one sees him.

Fasting develops piety and God-consciousness in the soul. It trains us to lower our gaze when we see forbidden or tempting scenes. How can we refrain from what is prohibited if we are not raised on the principle of God-consciousness and the fear of Allaah The Almighty in secret and in public? This is what the month of *Ramadhaan* teaches us. A woman stands in her kitchen in front of different types of food and drink but does not eat a single bite or take a single sip! Who is watching her and prevents her? It is Allaah The Almighty.

In ablution, a Muslim rinses his mouth with water while he is fasting and

no one would know if he swallows it. Who prevents him from swallowing a single drop? It is the principle of God-consciousness and the fear of Allaah The All-Knowing, The Acquainted. A Muslim is mindful of Allaah The Almighty regarding his fasting, prayers, and his children. He should be mindful of Allaah The Almighty regarding his work, and the Muslim woman should be mindful of Allaah The Almighty regarding the clothes that she wears in front of *non- Mahrams* (marriageable men).

This leads us to one of the fruits of piety, which is also one of the benefits of fasting:

(2) Achieving sincerity and keeping away from ostentation:

The fasting person abstains from permissible desires, which are dear to the hearts, for the sake of Allaah The Almighty Alone, at a time when no one sees him. He does so out of sincerity to Allaah The Almighty. This is required in all acts of worship both outward and inward. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***And they were not commanded except to worship Allaah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth.***}** [Quran 98:5] It means that they are sincere to Allaah The Almighty in their work. They were not only commanded to worship, but to worship sincerely.

It was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah, may Allaah be pleased with him, that the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said that Allaah The Almighty Says in a *Hadeeth Qudsi* (sacred narration): *"The fasting person leaves his food and drink for Me; fasting is for Me and I shall reward it."* [Al-Bukhaari]

The first part of the *Hadeeth* develops a desire to in a person to dedicate his

deeds to Allaah The Almighty Alone and fosters the principle of avoiding ostentation and insincerity to Allaah The Almighty in both outward and inward actions. A reported narration reads: *"There is no ostentation in fasting."* Al-Haafith Ibn Hajar, may Allaah have mercy upon him, comments, "*It means that ostentation does not enter fasting by action; ostentation may enter it by words, such as when a person tells people that he is fasting.*

"Fasting is for Me." This is one of the meanings of fasting. It is a secret between the slave and his Lord, and there is no element of showing off involved. The second meaning is that fasting is not subject to decrease, when it is requited on the Day of Resurrection, as it is narrated: *"Every good deed is expiation, yet fasting is for Me, and I will reward for it."* [Al-Bukhaari] In another narration: *"All the deeds of man are expiation for him except for fasting."* [Ahmad] The best explanation of this meaning is what Sufyaan ibn 'Uyaynah, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, "*This is one of the most valuable and precise Hadeeths. On the Day of Resurrection, Allaah The Almighty will take His slave to account and compensate for his wrongdoings from his deeds till nothing remains except fasting. Then, Allaah The Almighty will settle on the slave's behalf the rest of his wrongdoings and admit the slave to Paradise because of fasting.*" [Al-Bayhaqi in *Ash-Shu'ab*]

Ibn Rajab, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"Therefore, the Hadeeth means that fasting is for Allaah The Almighty, and there is no way for anyone to take the reward of fasting. The reward of fasting is stored by Allaah The Almighty for its doer."* In general, fasting is training on sincerity to Allaah The Almighty in all actions.

A Muslim who looks at the life of our righteous predecessors, may Allaah have mercy upon them, will find amazing situations due to their utmost sincerity.

- The wife of Hassaan ibn Sinaan, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"Hassaan used to come to my bed to sleep, and he would bluff me as a mother bluffs her baby. When he felt that I had slept, he would sneak away and go out to pray at night."*
- Muhammad ibn Is-haaq, may Allaah have mercy upon him, reported, *"A group of people in Madeenah used to receive regular stipends without knowing from where it was coming. When 'Ali ibn Al-Hasan Zayn Al-'Aabideen died, they would no longer find the sustenance and stipend that used to reach them at night. As they washed him, they found marks of the sacks that he used to carry to the poor on his back."*
- Daawood ibn Abi Hind, may Allaah have mercy upon him, fasted for forty years. Neither his family nor people in the market knew about that. He was a seller of silk and used to carry his lunch with him and give it away. His family would think that he had eaten in the market, and people in the market would think that he had eaten with his family.
- Al-Hasan Al-Basri, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"A man used to sit in an assembly, and when tears overpowered him, he would resist them. If he feared the tears would precede him, he would leave the gathering."*
- When Abu Waa'il, may Allaah have mercy upon him, was praying at home, he would sob heavily. If a person had given him this world to do so in front of someone, he would never have done it.

- Sufyaan Ath-Thawri, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"Crying is ten parts: nine for other than Allaah, and one for Allaah."*
- Sufyaan ibn ‘Uyaynah, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said: *"One day I felt very soft-hearted and wept. I said to myself: 'If one of our companions was present with me, he would feel soft-hearted like me.' Then, I took a nap, and someone came in my dream, kicked me, and said: 'O Sufyaan! Take your reward from the one whom you loved to see you!'"*
- In the field of knowledge, Imaam Ash-Shaafi‘i, may Allaah have mercy upon him, the founder of the science of *Usool,* said, *"I wanted the people to learn this knowledge without attributing a single letter of it to me."*

These people were sincere to Allaah The Almighty, and thus Allaah The Almighty benefited so many people with their words. Therefore, a few words from the righteous predecessors are able to give life to many nations because they emerged from the hearts of sincere people.

It was said to Hamdoon ibn Ahmad, may Allaah have mercy upon him, *"Why are the words of the righteous predecessors more useful than our words?"* He said, *"Because they spoke for the sake of the glory of Islam, the survival of the souls, and gaining the pleasure of Allaah. However, we speak for the sake of the glory of the souls, the possession of this life, and gaining the pleasure of creation."*

Note: This does not mean that a Muslim should leave work altogether in front of human beings for fear of showing off. Al-Fudhayl ibn ‘Iyaadh, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"Quitting good deeds for the sake of people is showing off, whereas doing good deeds for the sake of people*

is associating partners with Allaah. Sincerity is that Allaah saves you from both of them." Al-Haafith An-Nawawi, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said while commenting on the words of Al-Fudhayl: *"A Muslim who wants to do a righteous deed, then leaves it for fear of showing off in front of people shall be showing off by leaving this deed because he left this deed for the sake of people."*

Good deeds vary in that some of them are performed collectively, such as Friday prayers, and the daily congregational prayers, leading Muslims in prayer, announcing the *Athaan* (call to prayer), and the like. These deeds must be performed in public since they are the apparent symbols of Islam. There are other deeds that a Muslim carries out in secret. It is preferable to perform such deeds secretly, lest ostentation enters them – unless there is some benefit in doing them in public.

If you are doing a deed in secret and you feel sincerity towards Allaah The Almighty in it, then, Satan whispers to you, *"Someone is watching you, and you should quit that deed",* do not quit it. Go ahead and do not pay attention to the whisperings of Satan.

(3) Getting used to order and punctuality:

Many of us lead chaotic lives and lack commitment to appointments and times. When *Ramadhaan* comes, it gives us a great lesson in how to maintain punctuality and order. Let us reflect on one example to see how *Ramadhaan* teaches people order and punctuality.

The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam,* said: *"When you hear the Athaan of Bilaal, do not abstain [from food or drink]; but abstain when you hear the Athaan of Ibn Umm Maktoom."* [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim]

What was the time between the *Athaan* of Ibn Umm Maktoom and that of Bilaal, may Allaah be pleased with them? The narrator said: What was between them was the time during which Bilaal got down and Ibn Umm Maktoom went up. Thus, it is a difference of a few minutes. See how the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, taught his Companions the importance of time and punctuality. There is a time for fasting and there is a time for breaking the fast. If the fasting person does not comply with these times and deliberately eats food, say, two minutes before sunset, this invalidates his fasting. Do you see how fasting teaches us punctuality in order to save time, which constitutes our lifespan?

Many of those who fast have learned this lesson. When you enter upon an employee in his office in his spare time, you will find him reading the Quran. So does the teacher between classes, and students at school. You see everyone having the diligence to take advantage of time while fasting. However, we wish that this diligence and competition would continue in the night of *Ramadhaan* and extend after *Ramadhaan*. A Muslim is required to hastening to do good deeds at all times. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***So race to [all that is] good.***}** [Quran 2:148 and 5:48] It means *"do good deeds as early as possible and be among those who hasten to goodness in this life in order to be among them in the Hereafter."*

The order to race to goodness surpasses the order to do good deeds. In other words, racing to do good deeds includes doing them, completing them, perfecting them, and hastening to them. Therefore, the one who races first to good deeds in this life will be the first to enter Paradise in the Hereafter. [*Tafseer As-Sa'di*, p.186]

Not only does fasting train us to save our time, but it also teaches us

punctuality and better time management. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***[Fasting for] a limited number of days.***}** [Quran 2:184] Allaah The Almighty reminds us that *Ramadhaan* is a few days which are rare and precious and soon go away. It is regrettable to see some people in *Ramadhaan* spending their time with no benefit, and perhaps even in sins and misdeeds. They do so in these meritorious days when the gates of Paradise are open and the gates of Hell are closed! What goodness are those people are denied! The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said: *"Jibreel (Gabriel) came to me and said: 'O Muhammad! A Muslim who joins Ramadhaan and his sins are not forgiven, may Allaah distance him!' I said: "Aameen."* [Ibn Hibbaan: *Saheeh*]

A Muslim must utilize his time in *Ramadhaan* in all that brings him closer to his Lord and keeps him away from His wrath. This includes developing his own schedule for the deeds he wants to accomplish in that month, such as reading the Quran or a useful book, or visiting a relative or a neighbor, or providing food for people to break their fast with, or distributing beneficial tapes or posters to one's family and neighbors. If all these activities are done with prior planning and thought, they will be more fruitful.

(4) Reminding of the purpose of man's creation:

In the midst of life and its pleasures as well as the enjoyment of luxuries like food, drink, and sexual intercourse, man forgets the purpose of his existence and the reason for his life. All these pleasures and desires become indispensable to him. It may lead man to worship his whims and desires and remove from his mind the purpose of His creation – the purpose for which Allaah The Almighty provided him with food, drink, and a spouse. These things were created to help man obey his Lord and creator.

When things and means become the main concern and goal for man, for which he lives and which occupy his mind night and day, he will be captured by these pleasures and become their slave, thereby fulfilling the words of the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*: *"Woe to the slave of the dinar, woe to the slave of the dirham."*

Al-Munaawi explained this wisdom in an excellent manner, saying,

> *"Fasting has been prescribed to suppress the desires of the souls and cut the reasons of slavery to and worship of desires. Had they kept practicing these things all the time, things would have enslaved them and cut them from the way to Allaah The Almighty. Fasting removes the causes of worshiping other than Allaah The Almighty and grants freedom from slavery to beloved things. That is because freedom means that man possesses things, not the opposite. If these things possessed him, he would be reversing wisdom and the superior would be turned to be inferior, and the higher turned to be the lower. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means):* **{***He said, "Is it other than Allaah I should desire for you as a god while He has preferred you over the worlds?"***}** *[Quran 7:140] Desire is a worshiped god, and fasting liberates man from worshiping other than Allaah The Almighty."*

Thus, the Muslim must realize that he is a slave of Allaah The Almighty alone, a slave of Allaah The Almighty in *Ramadhaan* and at other times: a slave of Allaah at work and at home, a slave of Allaah in the *Masjid* and in the marketplace. Slavery is always bound to man, and he is a slave of Allaah The Almighty his whole life, in every action he performs and leaves. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***Say, "Indeed, my*

prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allaah, Lord of the worlds.} [Quran 6:162]

A Muslim feels that he is a slave of Allaah The Almighty in every situation, because Allaah The Almighty created him, the *Jinn* and all humankind to worship Him. How many times are you a sincere slave of Allaah The Almighty? How often are you obedient to Him? If you calculate the time that you dedicate to Allaah The Almighty in your life, you would know your status and honor in the sight of Allaah The Almighty. No soul will be wronged in the least. Listen to the words of the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*: *"Whoever wants to know his position with Allaah, let him see the position of Allaah with him."* [Ad-Daaraqutni; *Hasan*]

What is the share of Allaah The Almighty in your hearing and what is the share of whims and Satan?

What is the share of Allaah The Almighty in your sight and property?
What is the share of Allaah The Almighty in your heart? Does Allaah The Almighty have a place in your heart? The heart does not accept rivals.
"Whoever wants to know his position with Allaah, let him see the position of Allaah with him." Bear this *Hadeeth* in mind all the time.

(5) A chance for change:
This is one of the most important lessons to be learned from this month. If we look at the reality of Muslims today, many of us will say that it is difficult to change this negative reality. The streets are full of evil: newspapers, magazines, television and satellite channels air vice day and night. How can we change the people's conditions? Most people would say

this is difficult and can only be corrected at the hands of a revivalist scholar. Some people hold this notion.

However, there is the best example for us in *Ramadhaan*. How?

First: If we look at the *Masjid*s after *Ramadhaan*, especially in *Fajr* prayer, we will find them empty except for a few Muslims. When this month comes, the *Masjid*s are filled with Muslims bowing and prostrating to Allaah The Almighty and the condition of people changes for the better.
Second: Changing deeply rooted practices and habits easily. On ordinary days, you may find someone smoking and when you forbid him from it, he comes up with excuses. Nevertheless, when *Ramadhaan* comes, he patiently refrains from smoking most of the day and endures going without it. It is the weakness of the soul, passion, domination of Satan and his friends that encourage him to smoke again.

These examples give us hope to change the unfortunate reality to a better one, and that we should not despair of changing people's conditions or our conditions for the better. I ask you a question, *"When was the last time you read the Quran completely?"* The answer may be, *"Last Ramadhaan!"* When *Ramadhaan* comes, how many times do you read the Quran completely? Look at your morals before *Ramadhaan* and during it. Notice how you are keen to join the first row in congregation in the mosque and so on. Thus, there is a possibility for change for the better and for quitting the bad habits and deeds.

You only need to strive and have a strong will, and Allaah The Almighty promised to help and guide. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***And those who strive for Us - We will surely guide them to Our ways.*

And indeed, Allaah is with the doers of good.} [Quran 29:69]

Ramadhaan is indeed an opportunity for change, but who persists in having such a will even in *Ramadhaan*? The fasting person should not do anything that breaks this will after breaking his fast, and thus destroy in the night what he built in the day in terms of the strong will and ability to change.
The Muslim who is not spiritually affected by the words of Allaah The Almighty, and whose character and behavior do not change for the better upon performing the pillars of Islam and acts of worship, has not gain any benefited from the obligatory acts of worship – except discharging his obligations. In this case, they would be merely movements that he performs perfunctorily, and he moves on to another thing when they come to an end. Did Allaah The Almighty order us to pray only for the mere movements that prayer entails, that bring about no effect on our lives? Did Allaah The Almighty ordain *Hajj* and other acts of worship only for the sake of bodily movements and rituals? Or did He ordain them for greater benefits?

Muslims have not failed in their duties; it is simply that their hearts have hardened after suffering the political and cultural onslaught of their enemies, to the extent that they are no longer affected by the words, deeds and beliefs of the pillars of Islam and the rituals that they perform repeatedly. If they were affected by what they say and do, it would have ignited the flames of protective zeal for the sake of Allaah The Almighty in their heart and the desire to support His religion. Regretfully, the acts of worship of Muslims today have become mere images without a soul, mere rituals and movements, having no effect on their behavior.

Therefore, *Ramadhaan* is an opportunity for change. Many people are captivated by things they are used to, and whenever they try to give up

these things, they stumble. Some of them achieve success in overcoming their bad habits for a certain period of time and then suffer a setback. *Ramadhaan* is a great opportunity for lasting change. Fasting is an effective remedy for many of these common harmful habits and an opportunity to get rid of their stranglehold over us. It reminds man that these habits are not necessary or unavoidable; they are either self-imposed or are imposed by the circumstances of his life, and that one can give them up by determination and resolution.

This leads us to another benefit of fasting, which is:

(6) Training to have patience and strong will:

We are in great need to develop patience, to force ourselves to be patient, to endure, and to have a strong will – especially nowadays, when there is very little patience and weak will and lack of endurance are seen everywhere. It is the era of fast living and high-speed internet, in which we want everything by pressing a button! Let us be honest with ourselves: if the air conditioners in our homes or our cars or our *Masjid*s break down, what would our condition be? How would be our state if an enemy attacked us? Would we have the ability and patience to resist them? Patience has become scarce, but with the advent of *Ramadhaan*, we can re-learn this praiseworthy trait. We become patient over hunger and thirst as well as over performing the obligatory prayers and voluntary prayers at night. We give away money to the poor, and we bear the harm inflicted by people and deal with the ignorant. Undoubtedly, this trains us to have patience and endurance.

Our need for patience in many fields is great. In the field of seeking knowledge: knowledge requires staying awake at night, research and

extensive reading – all these activities require patience.

In the field of *Da'wah* and instructing people, we need patience and tolerance. Helping people to reach the truth and helping them overcome desires and forbidden pleasures are very difficult tasks that require endurance.

Luqmaan said to his son, as Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{***O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination.***}** [Quran 31:17] When calling people to Allaah The Almighty, enjoining good to them and forbidding them from evil, you must be patient with them because you are clashing with their desires and habits. Quitting bad habits and forbidden acts, which someone has been used to for years, requires patience. Fasting provides the best education to be patient, because fasting contains the three types of patience: patience with obedience to Allaah The Almighty, patience with the desires that Allaah The Almighty has forbidden on the fasting person, and patience with what is experienced by the fasting person of the pain of hunger, thirst and weakness of the body.

The Muslim who fasts in *Ramadhaan* learns to be patient with the prohibition of lawful things, because they are considered violations of fasting, and this educates us to be patient with what Allaah The Almighty has forbidden for us. Allaah The Almighty forbade lawful matters for us temporarily during the day and permitted them at night in order to strengthen our souls to relinquish the prohibitions throughout one's life. When the Muslim breaks his fast, he should guard his hearing and his sight from hearing and looking at prohibitions, and his stomach from devouring

usury and bribes. It is not reasonable that a Muslim obeys Allaah The Almighty by showing patience with the lawful but does not obey Him by showing patience with the prohibitions. Drawing close to Allaah The Almighty by giving up what is permissible will not be complete unless prohibitions are avoided. A Muslim who commits prohibitions, then worships Allaah The Almighty by abstaining from the permissible is like the one who leaves the obligatory acts and worships Allaah The Almighty by carrying out the voluntary acts.

This is the reason why – and Allaah knows best – the Quran states the prohibition of consuming people's money unlawfully after the prohibition of food and drink for the fasting person during the day. The prohibition of consuming people's money unlawfully is general to all times and places, unlike food and drink. It points out that the Muslim who obeys the command of Allaah The Almighty in avoiding food and drink during the day of fasting has to obey His command in avoiding devouring people's money unlawfully, which is forbidden in all cases. Patience is one of the most obvious signs of love. In other words, whoever loves Allaah The Almighty will show patience through Allaah, for His sake, and with Him.
Patience through Allaah means seeking His help to be patient since He is the provider of patience.

Patience for the sake of Allaah The Almighty requires sincerity and love.
Patience with Allaah The Almighty signifies that the slave strictly adheres to the commands and rulings of Allaah The Almighty, regardless of what they are. The slave commits himself to the orders of Allaah The Almighty, and this represents the hardest and most difficult kind of patience, which is the patience of the steadfast affirmers of the truth.

Anyone who ponders on tondition of the people and the sins they commit will find that the sins are committed due to desires (desire for money/sexual desire/desire for prestige), and the only remedy for that desire is patience which is attained through worship. Worship provides strength.

Allaah The Almighty praises His prophets for this trait, i.e. strength in worship. Allaah The Almighty Says (what means):

- **{***Be patient over what they say and remember Our servant, Daawood (David), the possessor of strength; indeed, he was one who repeatedly turned back [to Allaah].***}** [Quran 38:17]
- **{***And remember Our servants, Ibraaheem (Abraham), Is-haaq (Isaac) and Ya'qoob (Jacob) - those of strength and [religious] vision.***}** [Quran 38:45]

Ibn 'Abbaas, may Allaah be pleased with him, said, *"They are [the people] of strength in obeying Allaah and knowing Him."*

Al-Kalbi, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"They are [the people] of strength in worship and of patience over it."*

Sa'eed ibn Jubayr, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"It is strength in work and vision in their religious duties."*

So, worship is the road to patience, and strength in worship comes by seizing the seasons of goodness, sincerity, and following the Prophet's way.

(7) Rectifying our morals:

Fasting narrows the passages in the blood, which are Satan's path through the son of Adam. Satan runs in the veins of man like blood, so fasting extinguishes his whispers and weakens his authority over the fasting person. Thus, you see the fasting person refrain from lying and obscenity in speech and actions and shows patience, truthfulness, and mercy. Additionally, the desire for goodness develops in him. In *Ramadhaan*, the fasting person learns these good values and avoids many blameworthy actions. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, urged the fasting person in particular to do so. He said: *"Fasting is a shield. On the day of fasting, one should neither indulge in obscene language nor should he raise his voice; and if anyone reviles him or tries to quarrel with him, he should say: 'I am fasting.'"* [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim] The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, also said: *"Whoever does not give up false statements and false behaviour, Allaah has no need of him to give up his food and drink."* [Al-Bukhaari]

One of the righteous predecessors said, *"The lesser form of fasting is to abstain from food and drink."* Jaabir, may Allaah be pleased with him, said, *"If you fast, then let your hearing, sight and tongue abstain from lying and the prohibitions. Do not harm your neighbor, and let tranquility and solemnity befall you on the day of fasting. Do not make your day of fasting resemble the day on which you break your fast.”* [*Lataa’if Al-Ma‘aarif*, p.292]

Imaam Ahmad, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"The fasting person should guard his fasting against his tongue. Let him not argue. He has to safeguard his fasting. If people observed fasting, they would sit in the Masjids and say: 'We preserve our fasting and avoid backbiting."* [*Ar-Rawdh Al-Murbi‘*]

I advise you in this month and others to safeguard your tongue – the muscle that man does not get tired of moving relentlessly. Many people have died because of the tongue. A single word might be enough to doom a man. The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, said: *"A man speaks a good word without knowing its worth, Allaah records for him His good pleasure till the Day of judgment."* [Maalik] Nothing is more deserving of long imprisonment than the tongue. Sufyaan ibn ‘Uyaynah, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"Long silence is the key to worship."* Al-Fudhayl, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"No Hajj, fasting, standing to guard the Muslim frontiers, or Jihaad is more severe on man than imprisonment of his tongue!"* Try it yourself. If you can speak only good words, it will be a credit for you. How many times have you spoken today regarding a person or your colleague at work?

The people whose morals or temperaments remain unchanged by *Ramadhaan,* and they even get worse and get angry for trivial reasons, do not know the essence of fasting. Worse still, some may justify their bad temper and manners by saying that they are fasting! Is this the fruit of fasting?

This man never observed the required fasting; he abstained from eating and drinking out of habit because people do so and it would be shameful not to follow the custom of people!

(8) Reminding oneself of the Grace of Allaah:

When the fasting person feels the pangs of hunger and thirst during the day of *Ramadhaan*, he remembers the poor and destitute people who do not have enough food or drink to satisfy their needs throughout the year. In

Ramadhaan, the rich and the poor are equal in terms of hunger, and thus those who are satisfied are no longer unaware of those who are hungry, and those who are well-off remember the insolvent people and fear Allaah The Almighty regarding what He is going to ask them about. Therefore, *Ramadhaan* comes to remind us of the blessings that we have, and secondly, to remind us of the poor people as we have tasted the pain of their hunger and thirst. As a result, we extend to them the hand of mercy, wipe the pain of misery from them, and try to bring happiness to their children as we love it for our own children. Only then will mutual hatred and envy disappear, and mercy prevail among people.

True thankfulness entails proper utilization of one's blessings by using them in obedience to Allaah The Almighty, to convey His message and not using them to disobey Him. Fasting in the right way helps achieve awareness of the blessings we have and awakens the sense to utilize of these blessings in a better way. Therefore, Allaah The Almighty ends the verses relating to fasting Saying (what means): **{***And perhaps you will be grateful.***}** [Quran 2:185]

Blessings do not mean food and drink only; we enjoy great blessings that are worthy of contemplation, such as the blessing of faith and guidance to this religion and the blessing of guidance within it. It is also a blessing that Allaah The Almighty let you live to witness *Ramadhaan* while He caused others to die. Health is also a blessing. A man came to Yoonus ibn ‘Ubayd, may Allaah have mercy upon him, complaining about his straitened conditions. Yoonus, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said to him, *"Would you like to have one hundred thousand dirhams instead of your sight?"* The man said, *"No."* (He meant, *'What would I do with a hundred thousand if I were blind'*). Yoonus said, *"Would you like to have them instead of one of*

your hands?" The man said, *"No."* Yoonus said, *"Would you like to have them instead of one of your legs?"* The man said, *"No."* Yoonus kept reminding him of the blessings of Allaah The Almighty, then, said, *"I see that you own hundreds of thousands and you are complaining about poverty!"*

‘Abdullaah ibn Abi Daawood, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"I saw an ulcer on the hand of Muhammad ibn Waasi‘ and when he noticed that it was difficult for me to see it, he said to me, 'Do you know what thanks are due to Allaah for this ulcer? That is because He did not make it in my eye or tongue … the ulcer has become insignificant to me.’"* Blessings include the sins that Allaah The Almighty keeps away from you while you see others drowning in them! Being grateful for blessings is a blessing in itself. When Allaah The Almighty guides you to thank Him for His blessings, it is another blessing.

(9) Fasting and health:

Although fasting is an act of worship that entails reward in the Hereafter, it is amazing that divine wisdom and mercy demand us to worship Allaah The Almighty with acts which benefit us in this life as well as the Hereafter. Therefore, acts of worship do contribute to our wellbeing, health and safety.

The benefits of fasting for the body are as follows:

1. Fasting stops the accumulation of wastes in the intestines and helps in excreting them. If these substances remain in the body for a long time, they could change into harmful toxins. Fasting is the only effective way that allows expulsion of accumulated toxins in the

body.

2. By fasting, the activity of the urinary and excretory systems is regulated and their performance improves. These systems play an important role in purifying the blood and body fluids and regulating the constituents in the blood and body fluids. Therefore, we find medical consensus on the need for conducting blood tests on an empty stomach, i.e., the patient must be fasting when undergoing the tests, which is the best way to check if the constituents are within the normal range or not.
3. Fasting helps the body break down excess fat and different precipitates in bodily tissues.
4. Fasting is a tool that can rejuvenate the cells and tissues.
5. Fasting guarantees the preservation of physical energy and distributes it appropriately according to the body's needs.
6. Fasting improves the function of digestion, facilitates absorption, and balances body weight.
7. Fasting opens the mind and strengthens perception. An old adage goes, *"Gluttony decreases acumen."*
8. Fasting is an effective cure – Allaah willing – for many diseases of this age. It reduces the burden on the circulatory system, lowers the rate of fat and uric acid in the blood and thus saves the body from atherosclerosis, gout, and other diseases.
9. Fasting is of great benefit to many heart patients, because 10% of the amount of blood the heart pumps through the body goes to the digestive system during digestion. This amount is reduced during fasting, since there is no digestion during the day. It means less effort and more rest for the heart muscle.

After the body is cleansed of its toxins and its systems rest through fasting,

it turns its energies to healing wounds, repairing damaged tissues, and regulating disorders in the tissue functions. The body virtually regains its breath and strength to cope with emergencies by the rest and relaxation it has been granted through fasting.

The fasting person may experience some problems during the first few days of fasting, such as headache, weakness, irritability and mood swings. The reason is that when the body gets rid of the remaining precipitates in the tissue, their dissolution results in the release of toxins that flow in the blood before they are expelled out of the body. As these substances pass through the blood, they pass through the body and all its organs; including the heart, the brain and the nerves. This causes disturbances in the beginning and the emergence of these symptoms, which disappear a few days after the start of fasting.

When the fasting person abides by a moderate diet and avoids excessive fats and carbohydrates, by the end of *Ramadhaan* he will notice a decrease in his cholesterol levels and weight loss, which confirms that *Ramadhaan* provides protection for his heart and is a cure for his illness.

If we follow a healthy diet and do not over eat at *Iftaar* (the meal for breaking the fast) and *Suhoor* (the pre-dawn meal), we will obtain the full benefit of fasting and realize the wisdom underlying it. Unfortunately, many fasting people spend the evening consuming various foods and stuff themselves with several types of food. Perhaps the amount they eat in the month of fasting is many times what they eat at other times. These people do not obtain the desired benefit of fasting. As Muslims, we do not fast to protect the stomach or to maintain the body, but we fast as an act of worship of Allaah The Almighty, and what has been mentioned above is

the effect of worship – all perfect praise be to Allaah.

(10) Freeing the heart for contemplation and *Thikr*:

Indulging in desires may harden and blind the heart, bar the Muslim from *Thikr* (remembrance of Allaah The Almighty) and meditation, and cause heedlessness. Emptiness of the stomach from food and drink enlightens the heart, softens it, eliminates its hardness, and devotes it to *Thikr* and contemplation. [*Al-Lataa'if*, p.291] Overeating causes the opposite.

'Amr ibn Qays, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"Beware of gluttony; it hardens the heart."*

Salamah ibn Sa'eed, may Allaah have mery upon him, said, *"A man was to be blamed for gluttony as he was blamed for committing a sin."*

Maalik ibn Dinaar reported that Al-Hasan ibn 'Abdur-Rahmaan said that Al-Hasan said (may Allaah have mercy upon them all), *"The scourge of your father Adam, may Allaah exalt his mention, was the result of a meal and this will be your scourge until the Day of Resurrection. It was said that the one who controls his stomach will control all righteous deeds. Also, wisdom does not dwell in a full stomach."*

'Uthmaan ibn Zaa'idah, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said that Sufyaan Ath-Thawri, may Allaah have mercy upon him, wrote to him saying, *"If you seek a sound body and less sleep, you should eat little."*

Thaabit Al-Bunaani, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said,

> *"It was reported to us that Satan appeared to Yahya ibn Zakariyya (John son of Zachariah), may Allaah exalt their mention, and when Yahya saw attachments of all kinds on him, he asked, "O Satan, what*

are these attachments I see with you?" Satan replied, "These are the lusts that I tempt the children of Adam by." Yahya said, "Is there anything for me?" He replied, "Maybe you are satiated one day and could not pray or say Thikr." Yahya said, "Is there anything else?" He replied in the negative. Then, Yahya said, "I promise Allaah never to eat my fill." Satan said, "And I promise Allaah never to advise a Muslim.""

Therefore, the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said: *"No man fills a container worse than his stomach. A few morsels that keep his back upright are sufficient for him. If he has to, then he should keep one-third for food, one-third for drink and one-third for his breath."* [Ahmad and At-Tirmithi (*Hasan*)]

Ash-Shaafi'i, may Allaah have mercy upon him, said, *"I have never eaten my fill for sixteen years. That is because eating one's fill increases the weight of the body, eliminates acumen, brings about sleep, and weakens the person in worship."* [*Jaami' Al-'Uloom wal-Hikam*, p.467]

Luqmaan advised his son, saying, *"O my son! If the stomach is full, meditation stops, wisdom is withheld, and the organs become lazy in worship."*

(11) Fasting suppresses sexual desire:

The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said: *"O young people! Whoever among you can afford marriage, let him marry. And whoever cannot afford it, let him fast, for fasting is a shield for him."* [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim]

The Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam,* indicated that fasting prevents man from pursuing his sexual desires. Some scholars linked this *Hadeeth* to the other *Hadeeth* which was narrated on the authority of Safiyyah, may Allaah be pleased with her, that the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, said: *"Satan runs inside the son of Adam like blood"* [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim]

Fasting suppresses sexual desire, which is evoked by Satan because it narrows the bloodstream, which is Satan's path through the son of Adam. Satan runs in the son of Adam like blood, so fasting extinguishes his whisperings and breaks the urges of lust and anger. That is why the Prophet, *sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, made fasting a shield because it cuts the desire for marriage. Fasting and acts of worship in general weaken Satan's influence and authority over man.

(12) Fasting trains the Muslim to look forward to the Hereafter:

The fasting person relinquishes some of the worldly matters in hope of the reward that Allaah The Almighty has prepared in the Hereafter. Thus, the measure of profit and loss is related to the Hereafter. He abstains from food, drink, and intercourse during the day of *Ramadhaan* in expectation of the great reward on the Day of Resurrection. This teaches us an important lesson in coaching the heart of the fasting person in belief in the Unseen and the Hereafter, attachment to it, and refraining from the immediate pleasures of this life, which lead to laziness and lagging behind.

People with materialistic standards do not see in fasting anything more than deprivation of the pleasure of eating, drinking and sexual intercourse.